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FBI Releases Documents Cataloging Ray Inquiry

By MORRIS CUNNINGHAM

From The Commercial Appeal Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON, June 24. — The FBI quickly found fingerprints on the rifle, telescopic sight, and the binoculars used in the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., but it was two weeks before the prints were identified as those of James Earl Ray.

This was disclosed Wednesday as the Justice Department released 180 pages of previously undisclosed documents in the Ray investigation.

The rifle, telescopic sight, and binoculars, which with other items had been tossed in a bundle at the doorway of 424 South Main moments after the shooting, were flown to FBI headquarters in Washington hours later by FBI special agent Robert Fitzpatrick.

Fitzpatrick also took with him a bullet recovered from Dr. King's body by Dr. J. T. Francisco, the Shelby County medical examiner, in an autopsy completed about 10:45 p.m., about five hours after the slaying on April 4, 1968.

An affidavit by George J. Bonebrake, an FBI fingerprint examiner, said the materials reached him about 5:15 a.m. April 5.

Later on April 5, Bonebrake said he "developed one latent fingerprint on the rifle, one latent fingerprint on the telescopic sight, and one latent fingerprint on the binoculars."

He said that on April 19, two weeks later, he compared the prints with those on a fingerprint card made by the Los Angeles Police Department on Oct. 11, 1949, and which was contained in the official fingerprint files of the FBI in Washington. He said that from this comparison he determined the fingerprints were those of James Earl Ray.

Other documents showed that while there was a wealth of evidence incriminating Ray as the killer, FBI experts could not prove that the bullet that killed King was fired from the presumed murder weapon.

An FBI firearms expert said, "Because of distortion due to mutilation and insufficient marks of value, I could draw no conclusion as to whether or not the submitted bullet was fired from the submitted rifle." But he said the bullet was similar to other unfired ones found in the bundle along with the rifle and other materials, and that other bullets fired from the same rifle produced some of the same physical characteristics.

The autopsy showed that Dr. King had been drinking at the time of his death. The autopsy report showed an alcoholic content in the blood of .01 per cent. Dr. King was 39 and weighed about 140 pounds.

The documents showed that city engineers made triangulation studies that traced the flight of the death bullet and prepared maps that assisted in the investigation.

While Ray's fingerprints were not identified until April 19, the FBI apparently was moving in on him before that time. On April 16, the documents showed, FBI agents visited the store in Birmingham where Ray bought the rifle and

telescopic sight and showed the salesman pictures of Ray which the salesman identified as those of his customer. Ray had made the purchase under the name of Harvey Lowmeyer. He paid \$248.59 for the rifle and telescopic sight,

While the documents had not previously been made public, they revealed very little new information about the investigation and slaying.

The name Eric S. Galt, the first to surface during the investigation, was the one Ray used in registering at the New

Rebel Motor hotel, 3465 Lamar, where he spent the night of April 3, 1968.

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PAGE 67

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